

Ignoring God's Plain Truth

Teaching Tips

June 26

Bible Study Guide 4, 2016

Words You Should Know

A. Wrath ([Romans 1:18](#)) *orge* (Gk.)—Anger, especially wrath against wrongdoing.



B. Reprobate (v. 28) *adokimos* (Gk.)—Rejected as unproved, failing the test.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Willful Ignorance Leads to Disaster. Some people do what they believe is right, while others constantly do what is wrong. Why do humans act this way? Paul points out that others disobey God and take pride in filling their lives with all kinds of actions that oppose God's decree.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Readings.

B. Complete Lesson 4 in the *Precepts For Living*® Personal Study Guide.

C. Reread the Focal Verses in a modern translation.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer and have the students read the Aim for Change silently.

B. Introduce today's lesson title.

C. Ask: "Do you think most people today believe that God is evident in creation?"

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask a volunteer to read the Focal Verses.

B. Be prepared with the information from The People, Places, and Times; Background; Search the Scriptures; In Depth; and More Light on the Text to explain these verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Display the following question: "How do you see God in creation?" Be prepared for answers that are either a testimony or practical how-to.

B. Suggest the students read independently through [Romans 1:29–31](#) and compare the list of depraved behaviors to society's ills today. Discuss this in class.



N—Next Steps for Application

A. Encourage the class to trust in the words of the Bible. Remind them that the Word of God does not change, no matter how much human ideas do.

B. Close in prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Ignoring God's Plain Truth

Song: "This is My Father's World"

Devotional Reading: [Psalm 52](#)



Bible Background • [PSALM 8](#); [ROMANS 1:18–32](#)



Printed Text • [ROMANS 1:18–23, 28–32](#) | **Devotional Reading** • [PSALM 52](#)



Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** Paul's plaintive story of God's magnificent creation choosing to wreck itself with sin; **FEEL** that humans really do have the freedom to be disobedient but will suffer God's punishment; and **DO** God's will instead of sinning.



In Focus



Grace was surprised that her philosophy class seemed to be totally accepting of the professor's promotion of relative truth. She knew at least ten students in the class who were Christian (and there were likely more), but none of them offered any rebuttal to the professor's lectures. Each time their teacher spoke of the idea that what's true for you is true for you and there is no universal truth, everyone nodded in agreement.

One day in class, as the class seemed unanimous that there was no universal absolute truth, making everyone free to choose their own morality, Grace timidly held up her hand. She spoke clearly and respectfully to the class about how even the statement, "There is no absolute truth", is a statement of universal truth and that universal absolute truth exists.

The professor immediately leveled withering criticism at anyone who would believe such a thing. Grace was lost in responding to the professor's grilling since he had many years of philosophical study behind him. Nonetheless, though she certainly lost the debate, she felt she had won a different victory in speaking faithfully about her Lord.

After class, three students approached her. Two told her they believed as she did and she had given them courage to speak up next time. One girl, Tamara, asked Grace a few probing questions about God.

We cannot deny God's truth, which is embedded in creation. By affirming His truth, we point people toward the reality of a relationship with Him.

Keep in Mind

"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are

made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” ([Romans 1:20](#)).



Focal Verses

KJV

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;



19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

NLT

Romans 1:18 But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.



19 They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them.

20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

21 Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused.

22 Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools.

23 And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

28 Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done.

29 Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip.

30 They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents.

31 They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy.

32 They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

The People, Places, and Times

Idolatry. Idolatry was widespread when Paul was writing to the Romans. The primary focus of worship for most people in the Roman empire was the Roman state and its rulers. "Emperor worship" was common. For example, Caligula, emperor from A.D. 37–41, declared himself a god and commanded the Romans to worship him. Although Paul probably wrote to Rome in a time of relative peace toward the beginning of Nero's reign, under Claudius (41-54 AD), some of the members of the church at Rome had been forced to leave due to persecution of the Jews and had only recently returned ([Acts 18:1-3](#); [Rom 16:3-4](#)).

Roman degradation. The Roman world evidenced the kind of godless characteristics that Paul listed in verses 28–32. The Roman Empire was known for its brutality against the powerless, and persecution of Jews, as well as anyone in the churches since churches consisted of Jews and Gentiles, became more and more common in the second half of the first century AD. In addition, wealthy and powerful Roman men were known for sexual licentiousness both with women prostitutes and with their male servants and other males in relatively powerless positions. The Romans also enjoyed their arena conquests, men fighting to the death against each other or wild animals. This love of spectacle and cruelty grew to the point that defenseless people, including children, were thrown to wild animals as an attempt to purge the Christians during the great persecutions. Although there were many philosophical and religious groups who supported morality and the common good in the Roman Empire, as with many empires, often those in power abused their authority, and frequently the powerless and the synagogues and churches were victims of such abuse..

Background

In the introduction of Romans, Paul starts with the purpose of his writing and essentially the purpose of his life: the Gospel. He lets the Romans know that he longs to come to them and build them up spiritually, for the Gospel's sake. He is a debtor to the Jews and Gentiles to deliver this message, the two ethnic groups that made up the Roman church.

As Paul lays the foundation for the whole book, he addresses the sinfulness of humanity in general and the Gentiles in particular. The first thing he talks about is idolatry, a sin particularly repugnant to the monotheistic Jews. By addressing idolatry first, the Jews in the Roman church would have assumed Paul was going to attack the Gentiles. This passage is a setup for a wider argument that not only the Gentiles but also the Jews were in sinful rebellion against God.

At-A-Glance

1. People Resist Manifest Truth
([Romans 1:18–20](#))

2. People Turn to False Gods (vv. 21–23)

3. People Then are Consigned to Depravity (vv. 28–32)

In Depth

1. People Resist Manifest Truth ([Romans 1:18–20](#))



Paul said that God is wrathful toward ungodliness and unrighteousness. His wrath is against those who reject the truth of His existence. God’s wrath, unlike ours, is not capricious or selfish but holy in His desire to see us living rightly. Paul said that the existence of God is clearly manifested, or obvious, to those who will look at creation.

These verses are part of the answer to the age-old question, “What about those people who have never heard?” Paul said that they are without excuse. Creation in its beauty, power, complexity, and harmony shows clear evidence of the Creator. More than just His existence is evident—Paul said creation reveals His character as well.

2. People Turn to False Gods (vv. 21–23)

Paul is speaking of idolatry when he speaks of turning the image of God into the image of creatures (v. 23). However, this same accusation is directed toward those today who worship anything other than God. Science, wealth, social standing, our children—nothing can replace God as the object of our worship.

Paul began this section by saying that these people knew God before turning away from Him. Humankind is glad enough to receive God’s gifts, but not willing to recognize God or thank Him for those gifts, so their foolishness results in blindness (vv. 21–22). Since they cannot see God, they replace Him with something they can see. Idols become their corrupted substitution.

3. People Then are Consigned to Depravity (vv. 28–32)

A moral decision is required to follow God. The people in the text did not like to remember God, and, “did not see fit to acknowledge God” (v. 28, NASB). Paul does not intend the list of depraved behavior that follows to be exhaustive, but illustrates how this mind works.

Possibly the saddest part in this passage is that these people know they are doing wrong, continue to do so, and encourage others who do the same (v. 32). This had become a concert of sin: they practiced, performed, and then applauded.

Search the Scriptures

1. How are the invisible attributes of God seen and understood ([Romans 1:20](#))?
2. What is the reason God gave people over to “dishonor their bodies between themselves” (vv. 23–24)?



Discuss the Meaning

1. Is more required of us than just acknowledging God’s revelation ([Romans 1:18–19, 21](#))?
2. How do we reconcile these verses when some unbelievers behave better than many Christians do (vv. 29–31)?



Lesson in Our Society

Most of us who attend Bible study have chosen God and His revelation. However, sometimes we act like we are functional atheists. We go through our days not giving God the thought and devotion He expects.

He told us that He would take care of us; do we wonder if He will come through? He told us not to worry about food and clothing, but how often do we? He told us everything we had lost for His sake would be restored; do we try to get even?

We might not show the litany of traits listed in verses 29–31, but sometimes we also do not glorify Him as God or are ungrateful (v. 21). How differently will we live and act when we believe everything God has promised?

Make It Happen

So many today choose to willfully ignore God and His revelation of Himself. Many also want to aggressively prevent others from believing, too. Our challenge is to continue our hopeful work, expecting and planning for opposition and unbelief. We should prepare ourselves to stand strong in our faith, and especially for the dark days when “no one can work” ([John 9:4, NLT](#)).



Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

[Romans 1:18–23, 28–32](#)

In this letter to the saints in Rome, Paul expounds for his largely Gentile audience the core of the epistle’s message—that all have sinned and need saving, but this saving is only possible by grace through faith. All here really does mean all, including both the Gentiles (exemplified in this letter by the Greeks) and the Jews. He states that Gentiles have sinned and are worthy of punishment. Then, Paul goes on to explain how the Gentiles have sinned when they have not had access to the Law for them to understand their condition. Thus, while Paul in this letter focuses on the righteousness of God, he has to show that where that righteousness is not practiced, God’s wrath is unleashed.



The wrath of God, or spirits, is commonly spoken of in the African worldview. This may be because most Africans, as very religious people (see <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/04/15/africa.religion/>), understand life as being shaped by a very active spirit-world—and these spirits (both good and evil) are closely involved in human life, as well as the material world and nature. Further, most Africans believe that reigning over the spirits and all creation is a god who, through the spirits, controls the affairs of this world. In addition, many believe that occasionally the spirits become displeased with the undertakings of human beings, so they unleash their wrath on the human world. In the African worldview, then, the wrath of the deity is a reality that has serious consequences on human life. For Malawians, for instance, when the spirits (generally of their ancestors) get angry—*mizimu yakwiya*—people must do everything in their power to appease them. For an African, the verses being considered here need little explanation. God’s wrath is not an impersonal process but a deliberate penal judgment. It is not some irrational passion on the part of God, but rather of His righteous and wholly justified indignation against sinful belief and sinful behavior. It is the inevitable retributive response of the eternally holy God against anything that violates His own being.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

After verse 17, where Paul writes about the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel, he suddenly drops his readers into the fearsome pit of God’s wrath. The connection between verses 18 and v. 17 is obvious. While God’s righteousness is revealed in the Gospel to humankind, His wrath is revealed from heaven against ungodliness and wickedness. Thus Paul diverts from this theme of God’s righteousness and dedicates the remainder of the chapter and the two subsequent chapters to the need to understand the only way to get right with God—by grace through faith. Here, he begins to explain what God’s righteousness amounts to for those who have exchanged the truth about Him for a lie—His wrath. Paul is straight to the point: The Gentiles, just like all law-breakers who deserve a penalty,

are under the wrath of God. Central to Paul's argument here is that even though the Gentiles have not received the Gospel yet, they have had a chance to know God's truth, but chose to ignore and suppress it. Therefore, they are equally deserving of judgment. Paul believes that sinful humanity universally represses the knowledge of God available to them and so is held accountable; thus, no one is condemned for not knowing God, but rather for suppressing and ignoring the knowledge of God available to them. The Gentiles are at fault.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven, not in the Gospel but in the facts of human experience—in the reality of punitive events of history. Thus, Paul is not talking about the wrath of God that will be revealed at the end of time (cf. [Revelation 19:15](#)). Paul is talking about God's wrath revealed in the punishments imposed by human governments, the accusations of conscience, the pain of childbirth, the necessity of toil as a result of a sin-cursed environment, and the inescapable penalty of death itself. Most significantly, the most obvious revelation of God's wrath is His "giving over" the Gentiles to the consequences their sinful desires and depraved lifestyles (vv. 24, 26, 28). This wrath—the consuming fire of God—is His settled and perfectly righteous antagonism toward evil. L

This wrath, says Paul, is directed against those who "suppress (Gk. *katecho*, **ka-te-KHOH**, to hold down, even though the KJV translates it "hold") the truth by their wickedness." One would ask, "What truth?" And this is the question that Paul wrestles with in the verses that follow, coming to a crescendo in verse 25 where he reveals it to be God's truth. In saying that the Gentiles suppress the truth, Paul implies that the Gentiles already have the truth and know it is true. This is why the Gentiles are not exempt from God's wrath, and must need grace to be saved. They have no excuse at all. Their ignorance of the truth is not real; it is a false ignorance. It is only pretense intended to cover their neglect of the truth—the very act of suppressing the truth.

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

This group of verses is a continuation—and explanation—of what was said in the preceding verse. The wrath of God is being revealed because all people know God and His truth since He has shown or made it plain to them, but they have chosen to reject God and the truth that He reveals. In a nutshell, Paul is arguing that the Gentiles know the truth because God has revealed it to them through the created universe. What the Gentiles can know about God is plain for them to see. Paul's use of the word *phaneros* (Gk. *phaneros*, **fah-neh-ROS**, evident or clearly visible) suggests that it cannot be missed at all. This act of God's deliberate self-disclosure to humankind, even today, grants people who have not heard the Gospel access to God's truth, communicated in and through the created universe.

Verse 20 continues to explain Paul's argument that the Gentiles have access to the truth of God even though they have not heard the Gospel yet. How is this possible? The answer is simple: since the creation of the world, certain invisible attributes of God—like His eternal (Gk. *aidios*, **EYE-dee-oss**, everlasting) power and divine nature—have been clearly seen through the created universe. In other words, the creation is the visible disclosure of the invisible God. Looking at the vastness of the universe draws us to ponder the Creator of this universe. When we see the cycles of the seasons and how every animal is suited to its habitat, we can see the wisdom of this Creator. As we even take note of our own human qualities of kindness and love for our loved ones and especially children, we see the love and care of the Creator for His creation. This is how the visible creation testifies to the existence of an invisible Creator and our accountability to Him. This is what scholars have called general revelation—the type of revelation that is made to everyone everywhere. The Gentiles are left without an excuse as there can be no pretense of ignorance. Creation's general revelation in itself gives sufficient knowledge to all human beings whereby every person can be judged.

Paul explains that the Gentiles had enough knowledge about God to offer Him their due thanks and praise, but did not. They neither glorified God nor gave thanks, instead directing their "natural instinct" for praise and honor to false gods like the sun, the moon, and other created animals, and in so doing, they were taken over by falsehood. This unwillingness to honor the true God with praise and gratitude led to further corruption and idolatry. The worship of

false gods—idolatry—only leads to further deception. Ingratitude toward God will always harden hearts and make them unresponsive to His self-revelation. These Gentiles became vain in their imaginations, or “futile in their thoughts” (from v. 21, NKJV). They became foolish and useless in their thoughts and reasonings. They darkened their hearts so they would not perceive or comprehend the truth.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

These Gentiles believed themselves to be wise. Some boasted to be the *sophi*—wise men—but their rejecting God is evidence of their lack of wisdom. The fool says in his heart, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1). They called themselves “philosophers” (translated “lovers of wisdom”), always thinking themselves wiser than believers. Of course, it is not unusual for people to confuse wisdom for foolishness, and vice versa (1 Corinthians 1:18–2:8).

The Gentiles “became fools” (Gk. *moraino*, **moe-RYE-no**, to be foolish or silly). Some Bibles say, “they made fools of themselves” (v. 22, CEB and NIRV), and became insipid in their imaginations, opinions, and conduct. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. They forsook the God of whom they had knowledge and offered the honor due to Him to idols. Trading the true God for impotent idols only demonstrates how foolish these people were. Paul, here, may have had in mind the forms of Greek worship he had seen on Mars Hill, which involved exquisite carvings and sculptures of the human form.

Paul has already made his case, that the Gentiles know truth about God but have suppressed and rejected it and have freely chosen to serve idols instead. Thus God is completely justified in pouring out His wrath upon them.

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.

Paul is still talking about the Gentiles here. He has come to the root of their problem: they did not choose to acknowledge God. As he has argued before, the Gentiles had the knowledge of God but chose to forsake His glory to follow their own passions and lusts. They did not find it wise to follow God. They chose not to think of, nor serve or adore God. This is where they went wrong. They forsook God, so He gave them up to a reprobate mind—a mind destitute of judgment, an incompetent understanding. The Greek word for reprobate is *adokimos* (GK. **ah-doe-KEE-mos**, useless, failing the test, unsatisfactory, or disreputable), which may be taken passively, for a mind disapproved by God, or actively, for a mind which disapproves of all good. As we read the text, it is important to note that God did not compel them nor refuse them knowledge; He did not abandon them at all. They chose to forsake God. And God gave them to their own worthless speculations. In the face of stubborn and obstinate refusal to honor God, people are left to their own twisted ways.

These Gentiles were left to have corrupt judgment, or none at all. Any mind that thinks of God as worthless is itself worthless. Furthermore, this reprobate mind not only led to sexual immorality as seen in the previous verses, but also to a list of twenty-one problematic practices that Paul says “ought not to be done” (v. 28, ESV and NIV). Some translators have “which are not convenient” (e.g., KJV). These practices are not fit or proper for human society, but disgraceful and shameful.

Paul finishes this part of his argument on the moral deprivation of the Gentiles with the list of sins characteristic of those who choose to forsake God. Taken in the context of Paul’s other lists elsewhere in his epistles, this list is not exhaustive. Some of the vices are listed in very general terms like wickedness, while others are quite specific like murder. Such lists were common even in secular literature at the time. Several such lists appear elsewhere in the New Testament, even though none of them are nearly as extensive as this one. Put together, these sins signify a societal

meltdown, although this is not to say that all humanity or Gentiles are evil all the time. He goes on to further explain that general revelation revealed in nature and the conscience has been obeyed by some Gentiles as Paul later explains in chapter 2.

32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

They know God's decree—that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

In this final verse of the chapter, Paul draws his argument to a conclusion—that the Gentiles had enough knowledge of God and His truth to be judged. However, here, Paul adds a new dimension to the argument, saying that the Gentiles also had knowledge of God's judgment. They know that to practice the sins he had just outlined in the previous verses deserves death. Thus, they not only know the right thing to do in their conscience, they also know the penalty for not obeying that conscience. Paul will go into further detail regarding this knowledge of God being implanted in the conscience in chapter 2. Sadly, these Gentiles not only commit these sins, but take pleasure in those that do them. Committing these sins is in itself bad and worthy of judgment. However, Paul adds here that to applaud and celebrate those who commit these sins is just as bad, if not worse, than doing them.

Say It Correctly

Reprobate. **RE**-pro-bayt.

Maliciousness. muh-**LI**-shus-nis.

Malignity. muh-**LIG**-ni-tee.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Person of God
([1 Kings 17:17–24](#))



TUESDAY

Judging Deceit
([Psalm 52](#))



WEDNESDAY

Liars and Truth Speakers
([Psalm 63:1–5](#), [11](#))



THURSDAY

God Hates Injustice
([Isaiah 59:12–16](#))



FRIDAY

Utter Contempt for Truth
([Jeremiah 5:1–5](#))



SATURDAY

Seek Good and Truth
([Amos 5:10–15](#))



SUNDAY

Ignoring God's Plain Truth
([Romans 1:18–23, 28–32](#))

